

# »Care Leaving Research 2025: Participation, Equity, Perspectives«

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Study »Care Leaver Statistics: Participation  
in the Life Course of Young Adults – A Long-  
Term Study«

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Participation in the  
Life Course of  
Young Adults

A Long-Term Study

## Care Leaving Research 2025

Participation, Equity, Perspectives

We are **Sibel Dönmez** and **Martina Pokoj**.

We work together at the German Youth Institute on the **CLS study** and are **delighted to be introducing the conference: »Care Leaving Research 2025: Participation, Equity, Perspectives«**.

Thank you...



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First of all, we would like to **thank care leavers and prospective care leavers**.

By **sharing their experiences** with us and making their knowledge available to us, they enable research to take place.

By participating in **scientific studies**, care leavers make an essential contribution that can initiate changes in the **child and youth welfare system** and thus **improvements for future care leavers**.

**Thank you** very much!

## A research goal of CLS...



...is to contribute to improving the general living situation of care leavers:

### **Full of perspectives, equity and comprehensive social participation**

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In terms of content, we will begin this opening lecture with one of our most important **research goals**, which we will explain in relation to the Care Leaver Statistics study.

Our research goal is to contribute to **improving the general living situation of care leavers**: full of perspectives, equity and comprehensive social participation.

These three words also sum up this conference: **participation, equity, perspectives**.

In our presentation, we will focus on the **concept of social participation** and the **conditions for participation of prospective care leavers** and aim to stimulate discussion on the connection between **social participation** and **equity**, which we can have together over the next two days.

Finally, we will look at the contributions from care leaving research presented at this conference, which take **diverse perspectives on the living conditions** of care leavers.

Fundamentally, the respondents in the CLS study are **young**

**adults.** This **stage of life** is now regarded as distinct with its **own characteristics, challenges and conditions.**

In general, the phase of young adulthood **is becoming longer.**

The phase of young adulthood has become increasingly extended: milestones such as entering committed **relationships**, starting a **family**, establishing one's **own household**, or entering the **labour market** are now reached later in life on average.

Additionally, **life plans are becoming more differentiated** with regard to relationships, family, work, leisure, and work-life balance.

This phase of life is marked by numerous **transitions** and **upheavals** and **changes in status.**

The scope for **personal agency** also contracts and/or expands depending on the area of life, and decisions may be revised and newly made.

Young adulthood continues to be regarded as a **formative period** for future development.

# Conditions influencing participation



**Individual**

**Societal**



**Institutional**

**Legal-political**



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**Individual, institutional, societal** and **legal-political** framework conditions play a decisive role in shaping present participation as well as social participation over the life course.

These **framework conditions** are particularly significant in the situation of care leavers. Certain structural factors—such as **political, legal and institutional policies**—explicitly and implicitly **influence participation**.

For the **CLS study**, we survey young people who are between **16 and 19 years old** at the time of the **first wave** and **still live in a foster family or in residential care institution**; thus, in this presentation, we refer to them as **prospective** care leavers.

Many of them are **currently in transition**, moving out of the child and youth welfare system which significantly influences their future participation.

## Institutional and political-legal framework conditions



**42%** of 16-year-olds and **51%** of 17-year-olds without out-of-home care experience have part-time jobs

**14%** of 16-year-old and **17%** of 17-year-old (prospective) care leavers have part-time jobs

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For example, care leavers **usually move out earlier than their peers**, and thus must establish and finance their **own households** at an **earlier age**.

This requires **financial resources** that must be earned, as parental financial support is often unavailable. One way for young people to achieve financial independence and build up savings is **to work in part-time jobs**.

In Germany, approximately **42%** of 16-year-olds and **51%** of 17-year-olds **without** out-of-home care experience have part-time jobs. Compared with data from the CLS study, this is a significantly higher proportion:

**14%** of 16-year-old and **17%** of 17-year-old **prospective care leavers** have a part-time job. Across all age groups, approximately **20% of prospective care leavers have a part-time job**. In detail, about **27% of those living in foster families** have a part-time job, compared to about **18% of those in residential settings**.

Conversations with **care leavers from residential care** indicate

that **institutional obligations**, such as scheduled laundry or cooking duties, reduce the opportunities for part-time work.

At the same time knowledge of the **abolition of costs contributions** ("Kostenheranziehung") in Germany seems not yet to have reached all young people, foster parents, residential care facilities, and professionals.

The requirement to pay a major part of one's earnings to the **youth welfare office** was a reason why many young people in residential refrained from taking on a part-time job in the first place.



Who do you tell that you live in a foster family  
or in residential care?



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Some care leavers have the concern or **experience that their care background is not always acknowledged**.

This can become a participation barrier shaped by societal attitudes. The CLS study, for example, asks **how openly prospective care leavers share their care experience**.

Approximately **57%** say that **they tell almost everyone**. **41%** only **some people**, and just **under 3%** do **not want anyone to know**.

## Social framework conditions



**50%**



of (prospective) care leavers experience being treated differently when they talk about their care experience.

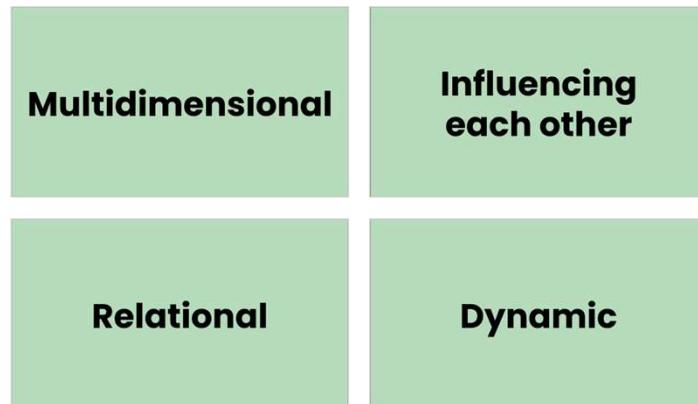


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**Half of those who tell everyone** or **some people** about their care background find that people **treat them differently** as a result. The most frequent response is that these encounters are both **negative** and **positive**; 4% predominantly encounter negative reactions.

This demonstrates that **prejudices** and a **lack of acceptance** of diverse life situations persist **in society** and **not all care leavers feel able to talk openly** about their living situation.

# Participation as a research concept



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How can **participation be conceptualized as a research framework** to accurately reflect the life courses of care leavers?

Life situations, trajectories, and goals are highly diverse and individual. Drawing on Bartelheimer et al., participation should be understood as **inherently multidimensional, relational, dynamic** and **shaped by reciprocal influences**.

We will now look more closely at these aspects with examples from the CLS study:

# Multidimensional

**Multidimensionality:** Life consists of multiple domains, each relevant for social participation.

# Multidimensional



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The CLS study covers the **dimensions** of

- housing,
- education/training or studies,
- employment,
- finances,
- leisure,
- social relationships, and
- health.

All these can strongly **influence social participation** and help explain both **barriers** and **opportunities**.

The survey also addresses **sociodemographic characteristics** such as gender and sexual identity, **institutional setting, agency** and **resilience, participation opportunities** and **life satisfaction**. If we want a comprehensive understanding of social participation, it is not sufficient to know if someone has a job and a place to live.

Supportive relationships, health and leisure opportunities play an equally important role.

# Influencing each other

The dimensions of social participation **influence each other**.

Accumulation of barriers and opportunities

→ Longitudinal perspective important



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**Barriers** or **opportunities** may accumulate; the more successful participation is in some areas, the greater the chances of participation in others.

Reducing barriers in one area can have positive effects elsewhere.

**Longitudinal studies such as CLS are necessary** to trace these **interdependencies** over **time**.

# Relational

Social participation is **relational**, it expresses the **interplay between individual and societal conditions**.

There are structural and societal factors that can **inhibit** or **facilitate social participation**.

### Interplay between the individual and society



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It depends on the **interaction of personal** and **contextual factors**.

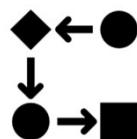
**There is no single, uniform level of participation to be achieved by all**; for some, participation in a domain is reached much earlier than for others under similar conditions.

This highlights the necessity to understand social participation **subjectively**, from each person's perspective.

# Dynamic

Participation is not a static state but **changes dynamically** due to **external influences, revisions of decisions, new possibilities, and individual development.**

## Development and change

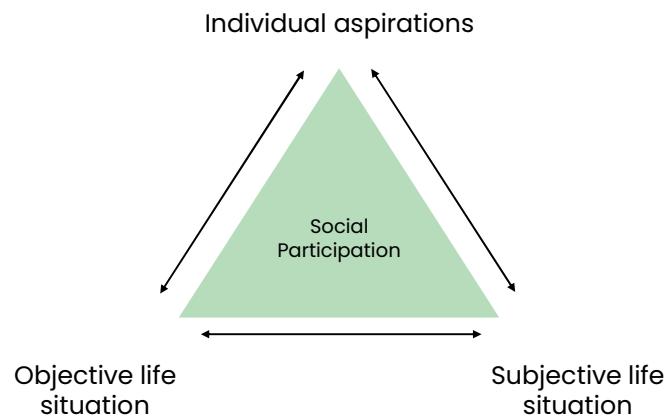


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To illustrate this further, we will use an example from CLS on how **social participation is operationalized**.

In CLS, social participation refers **not only to objective living conditions** (such as housing, educational attainment, leisure activities) **but also to individuals` subjective evaluation of these circumstances** and as well as their **aspirations** and **goals** for the future.

# Participation in the CLS study

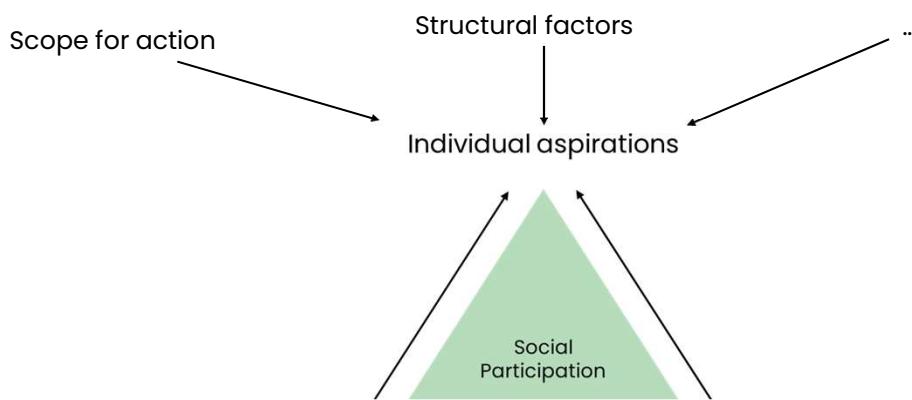


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For example, **regarding housing**, the study records the **type of accommodation, household size, and whether respondents have their own room**.

**Subjective** evaluation is captured by questions on **satisfaction** and **sense of feeling at home**, while **aspirations** are measured by questions on desired **future housing** and the **confidence that these wishes will be realized**.

# Complexity



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But how do housing aspirations arise and how can they be realized?

CLS approaches these questions by the **multidimensional structure of the survey**. Preparation for leaving care and support during the transition, discussions about available options, and the feeling of being able to shape one's life independently—these **factors influence housing aspirations**.

To formulate and pursue aspirations, young people also need **awareness of the spectrum of opportunities** and **self-confidence to pursue them**—even with support structures in place.

Scope for **agency** must be accessible; **structural factors** like the housing market, available resources, and attitudes toward young renters can have a **strong impact** on opportunities for participation.

This underscores the **complexity of assessing social participation** in a single study.

## Participation as a standard of equity



Young people have a legal right to participate



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Some of the findings indicate that **care leavers**, while not a homogeneous group, **face restricted opportunities** for social participation due to the framework conditions mentioned earlier, **resulting in disadvantages**.

To address this, **research** needs to **make** these forms of disadvantage **visible** to policy and practice.

This aim has gained additional importance since **Germany's Child and Youth Welfare Strengthening Act** (KJSG) took effect in 2021.

With the amendment of the Social Code Book 8 (SGB VIII) by the KJSG, social **participation was designated as a central guiding principle** of child and youth welfare in Germany.

SGB VIII therefore formulates a clear social-political mandate: **all young people should have equal opportunities for participation**.

Put differently: young people have a legally enshrined right to social participation.

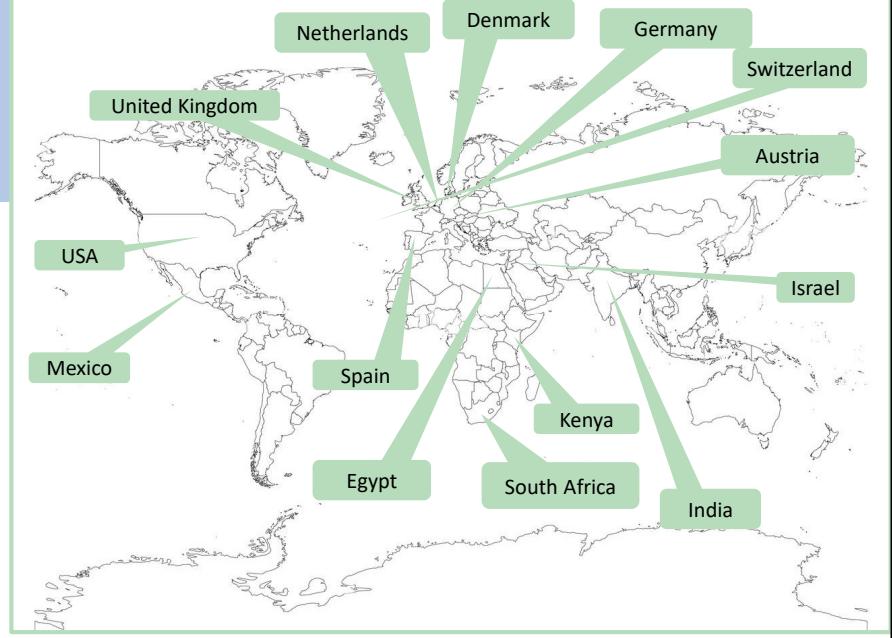
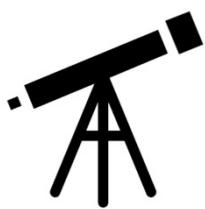
Internationally, the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** and

the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** similarly emphasize this right.

With the goal of enabling all child and youth to participate comprehensively and on an equal footing, equity has become an explicit justice norm.

The CLS study can **help to identify both enabling and limiting factors for social participation** and **suggest ways to enhance participation opportunities** for care leavers.

## Different perspectives



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We are pleased to welcome **participants from research, practice and policy** at this conference. Let us use this opportunity to discuss how all three spheres can better support and sustainably promote social participation.

Over the next two days, the presentations will examine the living situations and conditions of care leavers from **various perspectives**.

One perspective is spatial: **across the world**, different regions have different social and legal-political contexts.

We are pleased to **welcome** colleagues presenting from Egypt, Spain, Denmark, Switzerland, Kenya, Austria, the Netherlands, Mexico, Germany, South Africa, India, the USA, Israel and the UK.

Content-wise, we will gain insights into **research findings, methods and practice** from the areas of **social relationships, partnership and the families** of care leavers, as well as **health, resilience and well-being**.

**Transitions, transition planning** and both **barriers** and support

**opportunities** in the leaving care process will be discussed as well.

Other contributions will address **participation, educational pathways, the financial situation** of care leavers, innovative **survey methods** for social participation, for archiving **care experiences** and **care leaver involvement** in research itself.

There will also be a **bilingual poster session** with audio support.

Together



Contributing to the overall improvement of the living conditions of care leavers:

**Full of perspectives, equity, and comprehensive participation**

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The variety of perspectives from which a research topic is examined together, **provide a nuanced picture of the living situations of care leavers** around the world.

By attending panels and engaging in discussions—during sessions as well as informal exchanges—**we can together envision how both individually and collectively we can contribute to making the living situations of care leavers**, in our country and globally, **richer in perspectives, grounded in equity, and marked by comprehensive participation**.